

WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY

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Tuberculosis (TB) mortality remains high in Uganda, with about 4,000 people dying of the disease every year. The numbers are alarming to say the least. Yet, the high death rate is attributed to avoidable circumstances associated with poor health-seeking behaviour, poor drug adherence and inadequate funding.

Every year, on March 24, the world comes together to mark the World Tuberculosis Day. Tuberculosis (TB) remains the world's leading infectious killer.

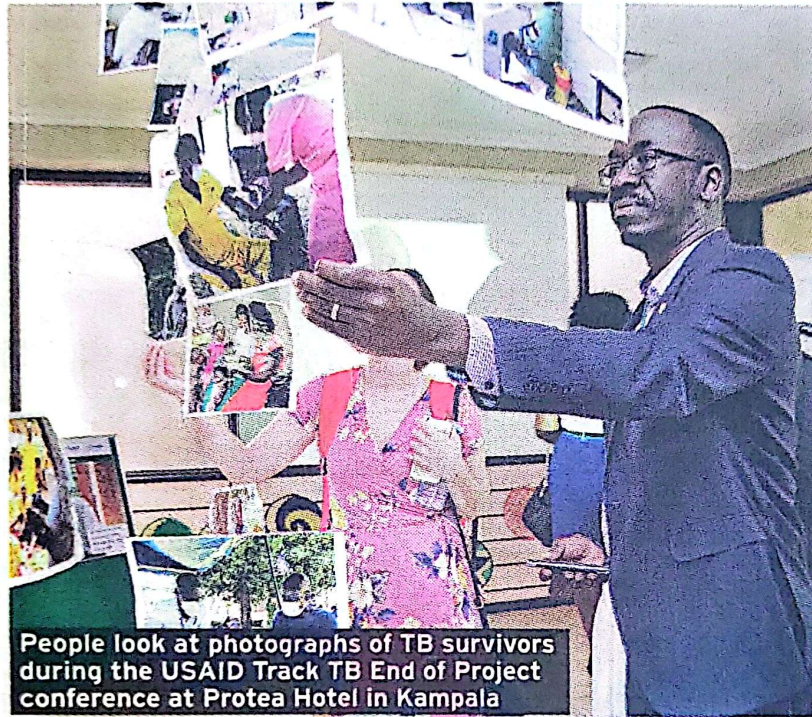
TB is a bacterial infection that attacks the lungs and is acquired through droplets from the coughs or sneezes of an infected person. The standard symptoms of TB infection include chronic cough with sputum containing blood, fever, night sweats and drastic weight loss.

It is said nearly 1.7 million people succumb to the killer disease each year and this makes it the ninth leading cause of death globally.

World TB Day is therefore, an occasion to mobilise political and social commitment for further progress towards eliminating TB as a public health burden.

The theme for 2018 is *Wanted:*

A TB-free Uganda is possible



People look at photographs of TB survivors during the USAID Track TB End of Project conference at Protea Hotel in Kampala

Leaders for a TB-free world. It focuses on building commitment to end TB, not only at the political level with heads-of-state and the health

minister, but at all levels from mayors, governors, parliamentarians and community leaders, to people affected by TB, civil society advocates, health

workers, doctors or nurses, Non Governmental Organisations and other partners.

This day is an opportunity for people everywhere in the world to join this fight by helping to educate others about TB and by urging their respective governments to take action. Now is the time to join the global movement in making a powerful statement and showing solidarity.

Uganda is said to be among the 22 high burden countries of the world. These are countries with the highest number of TB cases. Worse still, Uganda has a high number of TB/HIV co-infected persons with about 50% of the patients co-infected with HIV/AIDS.

A recent survey carried out by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Global Fund, in partnership with the Ministry of Health National Tuberculosis and Leprosy Programme and several other partners found that the prevalence is far higher than previously thought, with the number of people living with the infection almost twice the figure previously known.

According to the survey done

between 2014 and 2015, TB prevalence in Uganda now stands at 253 per 100,000 people, compared to 159 per 100,000 as previously known.

More alarming was the fact that men are four times more prone than women living with TB. The highest burden was found to be among people aged between 35 and 44 years.

An estimated 89,000 people get infected with TB per year, the survey showed, but almost half (41,000) of all cases go undetected, exposing more people to infection since they are less inclined to seek treatment.

The study revealed that undetected cases are highest in the 15-24 age group and the burden of TB was found to be higher in urban areas (504 per 100,000 persons) than in rural areas (370 per 100,000 persons).

A significant number (39%) of individuals with TB symptoms do not seek treatment, highlighting a worrying health-seeking behaviour, researchers stated. With this on our hands, Uganda has to channel a great deal of resources to reverse this trend. With dedicated effort from everyone, a TB-free Uganda and world at large is a possibility.